

Recent news articles and comments in the press have noted with some surprise the small attendance at the budget hearing. I do not know what your reaction is to this lack of interest in the budget, but I will give you mine.

It conveys very clearly two messages, both ominous for the future of the City of Newark. One message is that the portion of the population which enjoys many governmental subsidies, is assured that these subsidies will continue, that their needs have received budgetary priority, and there, there is nothing to worry about. Their assessment is correct, since they now constitute a large portion of the voting population.

The other part of the message is that those who supply the funds to support the City and pay for its government, are completely frustrated and disillusioned. Why attend a hearing on a budget that is essentially meaningless so far as meeting the needs that are so evident and providing the services that are so glaringly deficient?

Does the budget show any response to the repeated demands and need for improvement in public safety, for additional police? Does it give any indication, even that more catch basins will perform their function of draining storm water so that you can cross the street without wading in water above your ankles? Is the budget a firm statement and projection of the amount and purpose of all the requested funds? Apparently not, since at every meeting throughout the year, this Council approves requests for creation of new positions, changes in salaries, and other expenditures which competent administrators would have foreseen and included in original requests. No. The budget merely indicates you will pay more for services that, with a few exceptions, are inadequate or undelivered.

Now and then, I hear references to corruption and waste of public funds in previous administrations. We now see that great amounts of public funds can be wasted as the result of incompetent administration, defective organization, cronyism, favoritism, lax and indifferent supervision. All perfectly legal. I cite one example with which you are familiar, the failure of the demolition program begun eight years ago. The history of this failure is described in the May 18, 1980 issue of the Star Ledger under the headline: "Newark Doubles Demolition Funds." The article is more interesting and revealing than a budget hearing. During these past eight years, how many perfectly sound masonry structures have been abandoned, not boarded up, allowed to be vandalized and finally gutted by fire? The majority of these buildings could have been preserved, rehabilitated and profitably used. They were structurally and architecturally irreplaceable.

In short, lack of attendance at the budget hearing says clearly that citizens have lost confidence in the ability of the City government to do its job wisely, effectively and economically, and, furthermore, that they do not believe it knows how or intends to try to learn. The people who pay the freight, the taxpayers, now liken the City administration to a group of children playing with a fragile and valuable toy, with no care for or understanding of its fragility or value.

The City of Newark has great value, and at this time in its life, it is very fragile. It cannot tolerate use as a plaything, as a toy in an irresponsible game. This Council would be well-advised not to join the game. I would remind you that effective supervision, administration, and fiscal responsibility require much more than wearing a blazer and carrying a briefcase.

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